



**2003 COMMERCIAL SERVICE
INFORMATION PACKAGE**

A Global Perspective / A Global Career



Dear Prospective Applicant:

Thank you for your interest in the Commercial Service. Our agency employs United States nationals in a number of capacities. This information packet was prepared to assist United States citizens interested in becoming Career Candidate Commercial Service Officers to find information about the Commercial Service and Commercial Service Officer careers. This information packet is in no way exhaustive, and the information contained herein is subject to change without notice.

The Commercial Service offers an outstanding platform for personal and professional growth. As members of the United State's diplomatic corps, Commercial Service Officers commonly have access to persons and places that are beyond the reach of most of their peers. A career as a Commercial Service Officer also provides outstanding opportunities to learn new languages and travel internationally. However, a Commercial Service Officer career is not for everyone. The demands on one's person and family should not be underestimated. Commercial Service Officers spend the majority of their careers overseas, far from home and often in challenging environments. Spouses and other accompanying dependents may find their careers disrupted. Therefore, the decision to become a Commercial Service Officer is one that should involve all of the members of your household.

I hope that I have piqued your interest. I would encourage you to become familiar with our agency. For more information and updates on our latest developments, visit our website, www.export.gov/commercialservice/. Your application is most certainly welcome.



The Commercial Service

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The United States and Foreign Commercial Service one of four Official Foreign Affairs Agencies under the Foreign Service Act of 1980. The Commercial Service, as we are more commonly known, is responsible for the promotion of United States goods and services overseas and for the protection of United States commercial interests. The other three official Foreign Affairs Agencies include the United States Department of State, the United States Agency for International Development, and the Foreign Agricultural Service. Each agency specializes in one or more functional areas of Foreign Affairs. The Commercial Service is responsible for ***Commercial Affairs***.

Commercial Service Officers are officers of the United States Government, appointed by the President with the advice and consent of the Senate to represent the Government of the United States to foreign sovereign states. Commercial Service Officers help United States businesses to decide when and whether to begin to export; develop export strategies; and locate export financing and business partners, such as agents, distributors, and joint venture partners. Commercial Service Officers articulate, develop and refine United States commercial policy; coordinate trade missions attended by corporate and government executives that expand United States export market share overseas; and cultivate personal and professional contacts to be used in influencing foreign trade regimes to benefit and defend United States commercial interests. Whether serving ***overseas or domestically***, Commercial Service Officer assignments present the opportunity to use insights gained from personal and professional experience to make a difference in the world.

Serving a substantial portion of their careers at overseas diplomatic missions (often embassies, consulates or trade centers), Commercial Service Officers enjoy access to places and people beyond the experience of most United States Government employees. As an accredited United States diplomat, the Commercial Service Officer is regarded as an official representative of the United States by the accrediting country, and carries the privileges and responsibilities associated with that representation at all times. While the demands on Officers' personal time are great, they are often offset by the opportunity to learn new languages, travel to diverse locations, live in new cultures, and expand professional competencies through first-hand experience in foreign markets.

The following information has been prepared to help you decide whether a Commercial Service Officer career is ***the right choice for you***. Please take the time to familiarize yourself with the challenges, obligations and responsibilities that exist in the Commercial Service. In the end, we hope that you will agree that a career in the Commercial Service is well worth your time and energy.





Qualification Requirements

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Generally, all applicants must meet the following criteria:

1. Possess a BA or BS degree and have two years of specialized experience. Specialized experience is described as experience performing the following duties:

- ❑ Assisting with the production of regional and/or international market analyses that are accepted as accurate and authoritative, and that form the basis of business-related decisions.
- ❑ Assisting with the development or implementation of an international trade and marketing strategy for a U.S. product or service which includes identifying target foreign market, analyzing the potential of these new markets, developing a business plan to successfully establish business operations and promoting the product or service domestically or internationally.
- ❑ Assisting in the planning and implementation of trade promotion events such as trade fairs or trade missions.
- ❑ Actively participating in contacts with foreign governments or other organizations to influence the outcome of business activities between U.S. companies and foreign markets.
- ❑ Contributing to the analysis of commercial issues requiring trade, economic, or business knowledge of one or more geographic or political regions.

OR

2. Possess a MA or MS Degree or other graduate degree and one year of specialized experience as described above.

3. Applicant must also:

- ❑ Be a U.S. Citizen.
- ❑ Be between the ages of 21 and 59 – The Foreign Service has a mandatory retirement age of 65. To retire under a Foreign Service retirement system, one must have at least five years of service credit under the system.
- ❑ Be available for a worldwide assignment and be willing to relocate approximately every 3-4 years.

NOTE: We may request an applicant meet the criteria for limited non-career vacancies at other higher grades. These criteria will be outlined in detail in each vacancy announcement.

How do I apply?

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A job announcement is placed on employment page of the www.export.gov/commercialservice/ website approximately three to four months prior to the Assessment. The vacancy announcement can also be found at www.usajobs.opm.gov (go to the Department of Commerce, International Trade Administration listings), www.ita.doc.gov (click on jobs & internships and look for the “COOL” (Commerce Opportunities On Line) logo)), and www.jobs.doc.gov (go to the International Trade Administration listings) when it is advertised. The application process is completely online.

All applications are reviewed and rated and those individuals that meet the criteria for trade related education and experience are invited to attend the Commercial Service Assessment (a specialized version of the Foreign Service Exam). The Assessment is a competitive, daylong examination that consists of a number of exercises that may include any or all of the following: hypothetical exercises, writing exercises, in-box tests, leaderless group exercises and an interview.

Those who pass the Assessment are placed on a list called the Rank Order Register. Conditional offers of employment are made from the Rank Order Register, from the highest scorer to the lowest on the list. The register is valid for a maximum of twenty-four months from the date certified. The candidates who are not selected before the Rank Order Register is exhausted may reapply for the next Assessment.

Foreign Commercial Service Officer

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Commercial Service Officers (Commercial Officers) serving overseas provide in-country leadership for United States export promotion programs, designed in partnership with other agencies and organizations, to capitalize on existing market potential and create new opportunities. Commercial Officers advocate and intercede with local governments and trade organizations on behalf of United States companies, and develop and utilize an extensive network of host country contacts at the local, regional, and national levels. The Commercial Section at a United States diplomatic mission hosts Congressional, state and local government delegations, as directed by the Ambassador, and coordinates trade delegations led by senior Administration officials. Commercial Officers lead the implementation of Trade Promotion Coordinating Committee country / regional initiatives, support policy negotiations, resolve trade complaints, and implement comprehensive country export promotion programs.

There are over 270 Commercial Service Officers serving in 160 cities in 85 countries worldwide – usually in locations with the most promising market potential for United States goods and services. Over the course of a 20-year career, the typical Officer can expect to serve in at least five domestic and / or overseas assignments.

The Senior Commercial Officer (SCO) oversees the Commercial Section of an overseas diplomatic mission, including a staff of Commercial Service Officers; local citizen staff, called Foreign Service Nationals, or FSNs; and any United States or third-country national local hires. Commercial Sections may range in size from one or two Officers with only a few FSNs, to large posts with 10 or 12 Officers and 40 or more FSNs. In addition to planning and administering programs and budgets, managing FSNs as we communicate across language and cultural barriers is part of every Commercial Officer's job.

Generally, the SCO reports directly to the Ambassador and is part of the Ambassador's Country Team. Under the general direction of the Ambassador, the SCO and the Commercial Section of the Mission focus on commercial and trade issues. The SCO is the Ambassador's principal advisor on commercial issues, and typically takes the lead in formulating the post's Strategic Commercial Plan. The staff of the Commercial Section works closely with staff from other agencies at the Mission on issues that cut across agency lines (e.g. the United States Department of State, the United States Department of Agriculture, and the United States Department of Defense).

... and Other Duties as Assigned

In addition to the duties performed during normal office hours, Commercial Officers serving overseas have **representational responsibilities** that must be fulfilled during the evenings or on the weekends. These responsibilities may include hosting social events at home or attending receptions several times per week in an effort to build professional ties with local officials and business representatives.

The Commercial Officer, like all other Officers at the Mission, must also take his or her turn serving as ***Duty Officer***. The Duty Officer is on call evenings, weekends and holidays, for a week at a time, to handle emergencies. Examples of emergencies include receiving a call from the lawyer of a jailed United States national at 2:00 a.m. demanding immediate assistance from the Embassy, or checking incoming cables on New Year's Day to determine if any urgent issues should be brought to the Ambassador's attention. Officers at a smaller post usually serve as Duty Officer more often.

During emergencies, the Ambassador has the authority to deploy staff as he or she sees fit, regardless of the Department to which the staff member belongs. Consequently, a Commercial Officer might find him or herself running the Embassy's motor pool or serving as a Site Officer, organizing and managing logistics for meetings during a Presidential visit. If the host country is undergoing a period of civil disturbance, a Commercial Officer may assist in evacuating United States nationals from the area.



Promoting Diversity

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The Commercial Service recognizes the value of a diverse workforce and actively seeks to promote diversity. Our diversity is part of what makes us unique, as individuals and as a nation. Aspects of our diversity contribute to our personal identities and allow us to approach problems from different perspectives. Promoting diversity means creating a workplace that is inclusive and permits our organization to benefit from new ideas and innovations.

Through a series of innovative strategies, the Commercial Service taps the wealth of human resource available in the United States' many communities. ***The Ronald H. Brown Commercial Service Fellowship Program*** was inaugurated in 1995 to increase the number of persons from under-represented populations serving in the Commercial Service. We currently have nine fellows in various stages of graduate study at major institutions of higher learning, and gaining professional experience in our Commercial Service domestic field offices. The Commercial Service also actively participates in the ***United States Department of Commerce Diversity Working Group***, an organization that pools the resources of each of the Department's bureaus to educate the public and recruit from among various under-represented populations. Both, in cooperation with the Working Group and separate from it, the Commercial Service has recruited at ***professional conferences***, including the National Urban League, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Asian Pacific American Foreign Affairs Council, the President's Committee on the Employment of People with Disabilities (job fair), and the League of Latin American Citizens, to name only a few. The Commercial Service also conducts ***targeted recruitment*** at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic Serving Institutions, and Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities.

The Commercial Service also promotes diversity in its programs. Among those programs specially targeted toward under-represented populations, the ***Global Diversity Initiative*** provides support to minority-owned, new-to-export companies; export marketing training, consulting and support to new-to-export firms; and participation in global trade events. The ***Rural Export Initiative*** utilizes new technology to bring export opportunities to companies in rural areas of the United States; creates local supportive partner networks; and ensures better access to export assistance programs for rural companies. The ***Women's Initiative*** increases market access to women-owned Small- and Medium-sized Enterprises; offers consulting services; and facilitates partner contacts for women-owned firms.

In the belief that diversity is one of our national assets, the Commercial Service has been both, proactive and innovative in its recruitment, employment and programmatic efforts. It is our goal as an organization to ensure that the Commercial Service represents the many faces of the United States in all of its endeavors.



Assignments and Tours of Duty

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The Assignments Panel is a body comprised of members from within the International Trade Administration that determines all Commercial Service Officer assignments. Decisions of the Assignments Panel take account of such factors as transfer eligibility; personal rank; performance; language proficiency; requirements pertaining to hardship and domestic tours; requirements for substantial overseas service; and the expressed interest of the employee, including considerations of career and professional development. Career (tenured) and Career Candidate (tenure-track) Commercial Service Officers formally express their preferences in the form of a “bid list”. However, the needs of the Service come first; and the Commercial Service reserves the right to direct assign an Officer to a position.

All Rank Order Register Candidates are direct assigned to positions for their first tours of duty. The Rank Order Register is a list of persons who have passed the Commercial Service Assessment, but have not yet been hired as Career Candidate Commercial Service Officers. Rank Order Register Candidates must receive and accept an assignment, pass security and medical clearances, and successfully complete a drug screen to be sworn-in and officially converted to the status of Career Candidate. Once hired and converted to the status of Career Candidate (tenure-track) Commercial Service Officer, new Officers are invited to participate in the bidding process. However, Rank Order Register Candidates cannot bid.

To determine a Rank Order Register Candidate’s assignment, the Assignments Officer reviews position and staffing requirements, and solicits information from candidates pertaining to regional preferences and language abilities. Based on the information provided by candidates, the Assignments Officer attempts to find suitable matches, and makes recommendations to the Assignments Panel. However, all candidates for assignment must be worldwide available, regardless of their personal preferences; and Rank Order Register Candidates who decline their assignments will not receive further consideration by the Assignments Panel. (Candidates who decline their assignments are welcome to re-apply to sit for future administrations of the Commercial Service Assessment and try to qualify for inclusion on a new Rank Order Register.)

The ***standard tour of duty*** for each post is set by the Director General, and varies from four years for non-hardship posts, to two to three years for posts in “hardship” locations. Regardless of the standard tour of duty for a post, all first-tour Commercial Service Officers are assigned two-year tours of duty. ***New Career Candidate Commercial Service Officers are expected to begin a tour of duty at an Export Assistance Center within the United States sometime during their first seven years of service.*** Officers may bid to extend their tours of duty in one-year increments; however, the maximum continuous stay at a foreign post, foreign is five years.



Tenure Requirements for Career Candidates

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Career Candidate Commercial Service Officers are permitted a maximum of five years to be converted to Career status, or “tenured”. Career Candidates are expected to demonstrate professional competence, attested to in their performance evaluations, and proficiency in at least one foreign language. The recommendation to convert a Career Candidate to Career status is made by the ***Commissioning and Tenure Board***. Tenured Commercial Service Officers are called “Career Commercial Service Officers”. Failure to be converted to Career status by the expiration of the fifth year of continuous service as a Career Candidate will result in separation from the Service.

Advancement as a Commercial Service Officer is entirely dependent upon an Officer’s skills and aspirations. Commercial Service Officers are eligible to enter the ranks of the Senior Foreign Service and the Ambassadorial Class. However, promotions are merit-based and do not take account of length of service. Once converted to Career status (“tenured”), the ***“up or out”*** nature of the Service forces Commercial Service Officers to continually demonstrate superior performance or risk being separated from the Service. The intent of this policy is to ensure the progressive advancement of highly skilled and talented employees through the ranks of the organization, and retain the expertise and experience of our most capable officers.



A New Lifestyle

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... Housing

When a Commercial Service Officer arrives at an overseas post, he or she will be met by a “sponsor”, who introduces the Officer to mission personnel and provides assistance with shopping, schools, household help, etc. for the first few weeks of the assignment.

Commercial Service Officers serving overseas are provided United States Government-owned or leased quarters, or are given a living quarters allowance which covers rent and utilities at a given duty station. Some quarters are unfurnished, except for major appliances, such as stoves, refrigerators, freezers, washer machines and dryers. Travel orders, therefore, usually allow for a full shipment of household effects (up to 18,000 lbs.). Effects not shipped may be stored at United States Government expense. The total weight of shipped and stored effects may not exceed 18,000 lbs. At some duty stations, basic furniture is provided. In this case, a limited shipment of household effects is authorized (7,200 lbs.). The United States Government does not provide housing, nor does it defray the cost of housing, for Commercial Service Officers serving within the United States or its territories.

Housing varies by post. In some developed countries, it is of high quality, though it can be small by United States standards. In less developed countries, quarters are usually very comfortable by local standards, but may not equal United States standards.

... Vehicles

Vehicles that meet local import and licensing requirements may be included in an Officer’s authorized shipment. Vehicles that do not meet local standards may still be imported (depending on the post to which an Officer is assigned); however, their use in country may require the owner to make significant alterations to the vehicle to comply with local standards.

Arrangements may also be made to ship newly purchased vehicles that meet local standards directly to post from the manufacturer; or vehicles may be purchased on the local market. A market for vehicles often exists within the diplomatic community among Officers who are leaving post and those who have recently arrived. There are significant restrictions that vary by country pertaining to the sale by diplomats of vehicles outside the diplomatic community.

... Allowances and Differentials

A cost of living allowance is provided when the cost of living differential between a post and Washington, DC is significant. Post differential is a fixed percentage of an Officer’s base salary, ranging from five to twenty-five percent that is intended to compensate

Officers for service in locations with difficult living conditions. Only a few of the CS positions have danger pay, is another allowance that compensates Officers for service in locations that present significant security risks. Education allowances will be discussed, below, under “Schools and Education Allowances”. Depending upon the duty station to which an Officer is assigned, one or more of the above allowances may apply.

... Accompanying Dependents

Legal dependents planning to accompany an Officer to post must pass a physical examination and obtain a “medical clearance”. In rare cases, dependents may not be allowed to accompany the Officer because of dangerous conditions at post, or for reasons related to the results of the medical clearance conducted on the dependent in question. In cases where a dependent cannot or does not wish to accompany the Officer to post, a *separate maintenance allowance* may be available.

Many training and orientation resources are available to Officers’ legal dependents through the United States Department of State Overseas Briefing Center and Family Liaison Office.

... Employment Opportunities for Spouses and Accompanying Dependents

The United States has Bilateral Work Agreements or de facto reciprocal work arrangements with some of the countries staffed by Commercial Service Officers. Bilateral Work Agreements may enable dependents of United States Government employees assigned to official duties at United States diplomatic missions to seek employment on the local labor market. In the case of de facto reciprocal work arrangements, dependents may apply through specified channels for a permit to work in the local economy.

United States diplomatic missions usually make an effort to hire the dependents of Officers stationed there to fill primarily administrative or consular positions at post; however, vacancies are usually limited in number. It is important to note that it is often difficult for the spouses of Commercial Service Officers to find gainful employment on the local labor market in most foreign countries. Commercial Service Officers and their dependents may make use of the resources of the United States Department of State Overseas Briefing Center and the Family Liaison Office (FLO) to learn more about overseas employment opportunities for spouses and accompanying dependents. Also, the Career Development and Assignments staff can assist spouses with career development opportunities with our CS College Intranet Service. Please check the FLO website for information related to family support services, family member employment, and community liaison services. <http://www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/>.

... Schools and Education Allowances

While Officers serve overseas, the full cost of tuition at a United States Government-sponsored school at post is provided for all dependents from Kindergarten through Grade

12. If there are no United States Government-sponsored schools at an Officer's post of assignment, the Commercial Service offers an ***education allowance*** to defray the cost of tuition, room and board, and periodic transportation between post and the nearest locality where an adequate school is available.

United States Government-sponsored schools include those founded by United States companies, church organizations, and individual proprietors. Most are nonprofit, nondenominational, independent schools, established on a cooperative basis by United States citizens residing in foreign communities. These schools receive assistance and support from the United States Government under a program administered by the Office of Overseas Schools at the United States Department of State. The purpose of this assistance is to help schools provide adequate educational opportunities for the dependents of United States Government employees and to demonstrate to foreign nationals the philosophy and methods of American education. Many such "accredited" schools are open to nationals of all countries and their teaching staffs, while predominantly American, include foreign nationals.

These schools range from tiny schools with only a few elementary school pupils to large schools of over 1,000 students, providing education through high school. Instructional programs provide a core curriculum that prepares students to enter schools, colleges and universities in the United States. The language of instruction is English, supplemented at most schools with instruction in the local language. The content of the curriculum is American, but may vary, depending on the proportion of United States nationals in the student population. The curricula tend to be largely academic and the quality of instruction ranges from good to excellent at most schools. Further information about overseas educational opportunities can be found at http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/schools/index.html.



Employee Benefits for Commercial Officers

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The Commercial Service offers a competitive employee benefits package for Commercial Service Officers. Covered benefits include the following.

... Retirement

Commercial Service employees, appointed as Career (tenure) or Career Candidate (tenure-track) Commercial Service Officers, are subject to the Foreign Service Retirement and Disability System (FSRDS) or Foreign Service Pension System (FSPS), depending on the individual's Federal employment history. There is a mandatory retirement age of 65 under the Foreign Service Retirement System. (The minimum retirement age is 50 with 20 years of creditable service, five years of which must have been covered by the Foreign Service Retirement System.)

... Leave

Sick leave is earned at a rate of thirteen days per year by all Commercial Service Officers, regardless of the number of years of service. **Annual leave** is earned at a rate of four, six, or eight hours per pay period, depending on the length of service. In addition to annual leave, **home leave** is accumulated at a rate of fifteen working days for each year of overseas service. A minimum of eighteen months of continuous service abroad is required for home leave eligibility, and Officers must take home leave after three years of continuous service overseas. Under home leave, the United States Government pays roundtrip travel expenses for the employee and eligible dependents to the employee's designated home leave address in the United States.

... Other Benefits

Commercial Service Officers are also eligible to participate in the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP), Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) Program, and the United States Government Life Insurance (FEGLI) Program. Information about these and other federal programs can be found at www.opm.gov.



2003 Pay Schedule

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The following pay schedule is current for 2003 only.

2003 Foreign Service Pay Schedule: Overseas								
		Step						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
C	FO/FP-01	85,140	87,694	90,325	93,035	95,826	98,701	101,662
L	FO/FP-02	68,988	71,058	73,189	75,385	77,647	79,976	82,375
A	FO/FP-03	55,901	57,578	59,305	61,085	62,917	64,805	66,749
S	FO/FP-04	45,296	46,655	48,055	49,496	50,981	52,510	54,086
S	FO/FP-05	36,703	37,804	38,938	40,106	41,310	42,549	43,825

2003 Foreign Service Pay Schedule: Overseas								
		Step						
		8	9	10	11	12	13	14
C	FO/FP-01	104,711	107,853	110,682	110,682	110,682	110,682	110,682
L	FO/FP-02	84,847	87,392	90,014	92,714	95,496	98,360	101,311
A	FO/FP-03	68,751	70,814	72,938	75,126	77,380	79,701	82,093
S	FO/FP-04	55,708	57,380	59,101	60,874	62,700	64,581	66,519
S	FO/FP-05	45,140	46,494	47,889	49,326	50,806	52,330	53,900



Questions and Answers

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Q. How does age affect your ability to become a Career Candidate Commercial Service Officer (tenure-track)?

- A. The Foreign Service Act of 1980 requires that Career and Career Candidate Commercial Service Officers be retired at the end of the month during which the officer reaches the age of 65. To retire under the Foreign Service Retirement System, one must have vested at least five years of service in the System. To ensure full retirement benefits to our Career and Career Candidate Officer Corps, the Commercial Service deems all persons over the age of 59 ineligible for appointment as Career Candidate Commercial Service Officers.

Q. How do health or medical conditions affect your ability to become a Career Candidate Commercial Service Officer (tenure-track)?

- A. All applicants and their accompanying dependents are required to submit to a medical examination to determine fitness for service as a Commercial Service Officer. Applicants are also required to pass a drug screen.

The purpose of the examination is to determine whether the applicant and his or her accompanying dependents are free of medical conditions, which require specialized evaluation and / or medical care, or which would be aggravated by environmental factors at certain overseas locations.

On a case-by-case basis, the Commercial Service may grant an administrative waiver of pre-employment medical standards. The well being of the applicant and accompanying dependents, cost to the United States Government, and the best interests of the Service are taken into account when determining whether to grant an administrative waiver. If granted, the applicant and / or accompanying dependent(s) receives a limited medical clearance for overseas assignment. Under no circumstance will the drug screen be waived, nor will an applicant who has failed a drug screen be hired.

Q. What happens to my Civil Service retirement benefits when I become a Career Candidate Commercial Service Officer (tenure-track)?

- A. Civil Servants who become Commercial Service Officers will have their retirement systems converted, as follows:

From... (Civil Service)
CSRS (Code 1)
CSRS OFFSET (Code C)
FERS (Code K)

To... (Foreign Service)
FSRDS (Code 3)
FSRDS OFFSET (Code G)
FSPS (Code P)

Retirement deductions would automatically be transferred from the Civil Service Retirement Fund to the Foreign Service Retirement and Disability Fund, or from the Federal Employees Retirement System to the Foreign Service Pension System.

Payroll Deductions for Retirement:

FSRDS: 7.4% of base pay
FSRDS OFFSET: 7.4% of base pay
FSPS: 1.7% of base pay

Retirement Eligibility (Voluntary Retirement):

FSRDS: Age 50 with 20 years of service
FSPS: Age 50 with 20 years of service (1.7% annuity)
Age 50 with 10 years of service (1.0% annuity)

Retirement Eligibility (Mandatory Retirement):

FSRDS and FSPS: Age 65 with 5 years of service

Basic Annuity:

FSRDS & FSRDS OFFSET: 2.0% of the average high three salaries for each year of service, including sick leave.
FSPS: 1.7% of the average high-three salaries. (Without the FSRDS component to the annuity)

Q. From the date of assignment, how long does it take to complete my clearances, take my oath-of-office, and arrive at my assigned duty station?

- A. Once the Rank Order Register is finalized; the Assignments Officer examines position requirements and identifies prospective vacancies that may be filled with candidates off the Rank Order Register.

Candidates are assigned off the Rank Order Register in the order that they appear on the list, beginning with the person with the highest score. The Rank Order Register is valid for a period of two years from the date it is accepted by the Assistant Secretary and Director General of the United States and Foreign Commercial Service. There is no guarantee of assignment off the Rank Order Register.

The assigned Rank Order Register Candidate receives a conditional offer of employment and has to either accept or decline the offer. Should the candidate accept the offer, the Commercial Service initiates security and medical clearances (it is incumbent upon the candidate to truthfully complete and sign all paperwork in a timely manner). To have a conditional offer of employment confirmed, the Candidate must have been granted both, a Top Secret security and medical clearance, and pass a drug screen. All together, the clearance process can take six or more months to complete, depending upon the candidate's experience and travel history, during which

time the Rank Order Register Candidate remains outside the employ of the Commercial Service as a Career Candidate Commercial Service Officer.

Once all clearances have been granted, an entry-on-duty date will be determined based on the availability of training and the candidate's Expected Time of Arrival at post (ETA). Entry-on-duty reflects the fact that the candidate has had a Standard Form 52 processed in his / her name, reflecting a confirmed appointment. Once entered-on-duty, Rank Order Register Candidates become formally employed by the Commercial Service as Career Candidate Commercial Service Officers (tenure-track). Upon entry-on-duty, new Career Candidate Commercial Service Officers take an oath and sign appointment affidavits at Commercial Service headquarters in Washington, DC. This is referred to as the Commissioning Process.

Once entered-on-duty, Career Candidates draw salaries from the Commercial Service. However, when applicable, their arrival at post may be delayed until they either receive the requisite language proficiency score or receive an administrative language proficiency waiver from the Assistant Secretary and Director General of the United States and Foreign Commercial Service. Language training may take from a few weeks to one year to complete. New Career Candidates will also be required to attend other training, including Equal Employment Opportunity, Diversity Training, Conflict Resolution, and Security Overseas, among other topics. Consultations with relevant personnel within the International Trade Administration and at other agencies may also be required as a means of formal introduction.

Q. What happens if I decline my conditional offer of employment as a Career Candidate Commercial Service Officer (tenure-track)?

- A. Rank Order Register Candidates who decline their conditional offers of employment are removed from further consideration off the relevant Rank Order Register. A candidate may defer an offer of employment for professional or personal reasons. At this point, the candidate must work with the Career Development and Assignments staff to make appropriate arrangements as to when one is ready to accept. To receive further consideration, candidates who decline their conditional offers of employment are required to pass the next administered Commercial Service Assessment and await their turn on the resulting Rank Order Register.

All Career and Career Candidate Commercial Service Officers are required to be available for worldwide assignment. When you decline your assignment, you are indicating that you cannot meet this requirement. Furthermore, your assignment is an offer of employment, conditioned upon the successful completion of a Top Secret security and medical clearance and a drug screen. By declining your assignment, you are declining an offer of employment.

Q. Do I have to take an exam?

- A. To become a Limited Career Candidate Foreign Service Officer within the Commercial Service (tenure-track), applicants must submit to a specialized version of the Foreign Service Exam called the Commercial Service Assessment. The Commercial Service Assessment is a competitive, daylong examination that consists of a number of exercises. Exercises may include any or all of the following: Situational interviews, Advocacy exercises, Editing exercises, e-box exercises and Leaderless Group Exercises.

Those who pass the Assessment are placed on a list called the Rank Order Register. Conditional offers of employment are made from the Rank Order Register, from the highest scorer to the lowest scorer on the list. The register is valid for a maximum of 24 months from the date certified.

A second class of Foreign Service Officer, the Limited Non-career Candidate, may be extended a conditional offer of employment without submitting to the Commercial Service Assessment. However, Limited Non-career Candidates will not be converted to Limited Career Candidate status and placed before the Commissioning and Tenure Board without passing the Commercial Service Assessment. The maximum amount of time one can remain a Limited Non-career Candidate is five years, after which time the employee is separated from the Service.

To become a Civil Servant within a domestic field office or at our Washington Headquarters, please see the International Trade Administration web page for current vacancy announcements, www.ita.doc.gov/hrm. Vacancy announcements are also posted on the Office of Personnel Management web page, under job series 1140, www.usajobs.opm.gov.

Q. What kind of training does the Commercial Service provide Foreign Service Officers?

- A. There are certain core training requirements that the Commercial Service provides to all classes of Foreign Service Officer: Career, Limited Career Candidate, and Limited Non-career Candidate. Core training consists of Equal Employment Opportunity, Diversity, Conflict Resolution, Performance Management, and Security Overseas. Career and Limited Career Candidate Foreign Service Officers are also eligible for language and area studies courses offered by the National Foreign Affairs Training Center.

Recently, the Commercial Service established the CS College, which is an Intranet-based on-line career development tool offering a wide range of professional skills management courses. This training complements other in-class training.

Q. What if I don't qualify (to take the Commercial Service Assessment / for Limited Non-career Appointment)?

A. Qualification requirements vary from year to year. Please see the relevant portions of this web page for current qualification criteria. For those who feel that they may not currently meet the minimum qualification criteria for a Foreign Service career with the Commercial service, realize that directly relevant experience can be gained. Alternate career paths that offer directly relevant experience include:

- ❑ International Trade Specialist positions with the Government of the United States (job series 1140).
- ❑ Export promotion positions with the export promotion offices of your state government with substantive export promotion responsibilities.
- ❑ Program Analyst positions with the Government of the United States with substantive export promotion responsibilities (job series 0343).
- ❑ Economist positions with substantive United States export market research and analysis responsibilities. (Within the Executive Branch of the Government of the United States, these positions usually carry the 0110 job series.)
- ❑ Research Analyst positions in private corporations that involve substantive research and analysis of United States export markets (i.e. consulting companies, banks, brokerage houses, and multinational corporations).
- ❑ International Sales and Marketing positions that involve substantive responsibility for moving product to United States export markets.

Applicants do not qualify on the basis of unpaid experience, academic achievement, language skill, or pedagogic experience alone. The Commercial Service also considers imports into the United States a “domestic” affair. Such experience usually is not credited as directly relevant.

